

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 IO-13 DHA-02 /074 W
-----069213 180138Z /65

R 171630Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6574
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL NAPLES
AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMCONSUL PALERMO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IT, GW
SUBJECT: ESCAPE OF NAZI WAR CRIMINAL STRAINS ITALIAN-GERMAN
RELATIONS

SUMMARY. ITALIAN-WEST GERMAN RELATIONS HAVE BEEN
STRAINED BY THE AUGUST 14 ESCAPE FROM A ROME MILITARY HOSPITAL
OF FORMER SS COLONEL HERBERT KAPPLER, WHO HAD BEEN SERVING
A LIFE SENTENCE FOR CRIMES COMMITTED WHILE HE HEADED THE GESTAPO
IN ROME DURING WORLD WAR II. A MEETING BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER
ANDREOTTI AND CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST 19
HAS BEEN POSTPONED. THE STORY IS BEING COVERED EXTENSIVELY
BY ALL MEDIA, AND LEADERS OF THE DC AND THE ABSTAINING PARTIES
HAVE DEMANDED AN INVESTIGATION OF THE INCIDENT. THE CIRCUM-
STANCES OF THE ESCAPE WERE EXTREMELY EMBARRASSING FOR THE
CARABINIERE UNIT CHARGED WITH GUARDING THE MILITARY HOSPITAL
AND WILL PROBABLY DAMAGE THE IMAGE OF THE GOVERNMENT.
END SUMMARY.

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1. ON THE AFTERNOON OF AUGUST 14 FORMER SS COLONEL
HERBERT KAPPLER ESCAPED FROM A MILITARY HOSPITAL NEAR
ROME WITH THE AID OF HIS WIFE. KAPPLER WAS SERVING A
LIFE SENTENCE FOR WAR CRIMES COMMITTED WHILE HE HEADED
THE GERMAN MILITARY POLICE IN ROME DURING WORLD WAR II
AND HAS BEEN HOSPITALIZED FOR OVER A YEAR WITH TERMINAL

INTESTINAL CANCER. KAPPLER IS UNABLE TO WALK BECAUSE OF HIS AILMENT, AND, ACCORDING TO THE DEFENSE MINISTRY, HIS WIFE LOADED HIM INTO A LARGE SUITCASE FITTED WITH ROLLERS, PLACED A DUMMY IN HIS BED, AND LEFT A NOTE ON HIS DOOR ASKING THAT HE NOT BE DISTURBED UNTIL THE FOLLOWING MORNING. SHE THEN DRAGGED THE SUITCASE PAST SEVERAL CARABINIERE POSTS, LOADED IT INTO THE TRUNK OF A RENTED CAR, AND PASSED THROUGH ANOTHER CHECKPOINT BEFORE LEAVING THE HOSPITAL GROUNDS. HOSPITAL GUARDS SCRUPULOUSLY OBSERVED MRS. KAPPLER'S "DO NOT DISTURB" SIGN, AND THE ESCAPE WAS NOT DISCOVERED UNTIL THE FOLLOWING MORNING, BY WHICH TIME THE KAPPLERS HAD ALREADY CROSSED THE BORDER. REPORTS HERE INDICATE THAT THE KAPPLERS ARE NOW IN WEST GERMANY. COMMENT: THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE ESCAPE MAKE THE CARABINIERE DETACHMENT GUARDING THE HOSPITAL APPEAR SINGULARLY INEPT. AUTHORITIES HAVE SUSPENDED SEVERAL OFFICERS OF THE ROME CARABINIERI, INCLUDING TWO GENERALS, BUT THIS INCIDENT, WHICH COMES AT A TIME WHEN THE GOVERNMENT HAS CLAIMED SOME SUCCESS IN ITS EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC ORDER AND IMPROVE POLICE PERFORMANCE, IS LIKELY TO DAMAGE THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE GOVERNMENT AND CALL INTO QUESTION THE SERIOUSNESS OF ITS EFFORTS TO COMBAT CRIME AND LAWLESSNESS. END COMMENT.

2. AKPPLER'S ESCAPE HAS RECEIVED WIDE COVERAGE IN ALL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MEDIA AND DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE OCCURRED IN A NUMBER OF AREAS EXPRESSING OUTRAGE OVER THE INCIDENT AND CALLING FOR KAPPLER'S IMMEDIATE EXTRADITION FROM WEST GERMANY. INDIGNATION HAS ALSO CHARACTERIZED THE REACTION OF THE DC AND THE PARTIES WHICH SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT BY ABSTENTION IN PARLIAMENT. PIETRO INGRAP, THE COMMUNIST PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, CALLED KAPPLER'S ESCAPE "A GRAVE OFFENSE TO THE ITALIAN PEOPLE". PRI DAILY LA VOCE REPUBBLICANA STATED THAT "THE COUNTRY IS IN SHOCK" AND PSDI SECRETARY ROMITA WENT AS FAR AS TO HINT THAT "GERMAN SECRET SERVICES" MIGHT HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE ESCAPE PLOT. THE DC AND ALL OF THE ABSTAINING PARTIES HAVE CALLED FOR AN INVESTIGATION OF THE INCIDENT AND QUICK ACTION TO SECURE KAPPLER'S RETURN TO CONFINEMENT IN ITALY. PRIME MINISTER ANDREOTTI MOURNED THE FACT THAT ITALY'S "HUMANITARIAN TREATMENT OF KAPPLER WAS ANSWERED BY FLIGHT" BUT EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE KAPPLER CASE WOULD NOT "UPSET GOOD ITALO-GERMAN RELATIONS".

3. RELATIONS BETWEEN BONN AND ROME APPEAR TO HAVE ALREADY BEEN STRAINED BY THE INCIDENT. ITALIAN NEWSPAPERS

REPORT THAT THE GERMAN REACTION TO THE ESCAPE HAS BEEN ONE OF "ILL-CONCEALED SATISFACTION" AND THAT MRS. KAPPLER HAS BEEN WIDELY ACCLAIMED IN GERMANY FOR HER DARING AND RESOURCEFULNESS. MOST EXPRESS DOUBT THAT KAPPLER WILL BE EXTRADITED, NOTING THAT THE WEST GERMAN CONSTITUTION FORBIDS EXTRADITION OF GERMAN CITIZENS AND THAT THE WEST GERMAN GOVERNMENT HAS IN THE PAST REQUESTED KAPPLER'S RELEASE ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS. PRIME MINISTER ANDREOTTI ANNOUNCED THE POSTPONEMENT OF A MEETING WITH CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST 19, NOTING THAT SUCH AN ENCOUNTER, WITHIN A WEEK OF KAPPLER'S ESCAPE, WOULD BE EMARRASSING FOR BOTH MEN AND THAT AN ATMOSPHERE CONDUCIVE T CONSTRUCTIVE DISCUSSIONS WOULD BE LACKING. THE ANDREOTTI-SCHMIDT MEETING IS EXPECTED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO BE RESCHEDULED SOMETIME IN THE FALL.HOLMES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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TAGS: PINT, IT, GE, (KAPPLER, HERBERT)
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